

without striking a blow. The loss of the province must be laid to the account of the ministers who had failed to garrison it during the winter. They had been guilty of acting with similar ignorance and over-confidence in the affairs of Aquitaine. Instead of sending out money to Prince Edward that would have enabled him to keep his army in hand, they had insisted on fining his high-spirited captains for irregularities that would have been better checked by the payment of arrears. The enemies of the ministry ascribed the unauthorised violations of French territory that had brought on the war, to the mutinous spirit engendz*ed among the English * companies * by these acts of petty persecution.¹ For two years after the seizure of Ponthieu, the war continued without any other striking event.

The Parliament of February 1871, which called the Incompetent ministers to account, marks the commencement of those political movements and party combinations which continued throughout the next fifteen years. As long as Edward the Third had been in the vigour of life, he had himself carried on the administration and decided questions of policy, while his son acted as generalissimo abroad. But now that the King had fallen into dotage, and the Black Prince had returned from Gascony sick of an incurable disease which did not permit him to take a large part in public affairs, a fierce competition arose among the great nobles to secure a larger share in the government than any had previously enjoyed. Although the Duke of Lancaster and the Earls of Pembroke and Cambridge had been since the outbreak of the war entrusted with the command of various armies in France, the ministry at Westminster was still composed, as it had been from time immemorial, of Bishops who were dependent solely on the King, and who were bound to the great lords by no ties of interest or party. William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, was Chancellor, and Thomas Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter, was Treasurer of England. The Duke and the Earls were often consulted by the King on matters of policy, so that the Chancellor and Treasurer had not that monopoly of the royal confidence enjoyed by cabinet ministers of to-day. But the

¹ *Ghron. Ang.*, butv-vi.